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TO THE END OF THE EARTH IN AN AIR-SHIP; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Great Mid-Air Flight.

By "NONAME."



But Frank Reade, Jr., turned the tables in an instant. Springing forward, he placed the muzzle of his rifle against the bear's ear and fired. The huge brute with a howl of agony reeled, made some futile blows with her paws and fell.

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To the End of the Earth IN AN AIR-SHIP:

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Great Mid-Air Flight.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Lost in the Great Undertow," "The Chase of a Comet," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW AIR-SHIP.

THE reporter Walter May rested his pencil a moment upon his knee and looked up with startled surprise into the face of the man whom he was so cleverly interviewing.

He had been sent down to Readestown by the editor of the New Times, to gather some most important information. This it was believed would be furnished by the noted inventor, Frank Reade, Jr.

The report had reached New York that Frank Reade, Jr., had accomplished the greatest feat of the age, and had mastered the art of aerial navigation.

It can readily be understood why such a report should create a great sensation.

That he had constructed and was about to launch a new air-ship was true. But what it looked like or how constructed only the secret workmen of his shops, pledged on their honor, knew.

That it was named the Rainbow, and that it was capable of carrying a dozen people had leaked out.

But all was mystery beyond this.

Now Walter May was reputed as being one of the keenest and brightest reporters in New York.

So when he went down to Readestown to interview the young inventor, all in the office confidently expected to see him return with a full expose.

Arriving at Frank Reade, Jr.'s shops, the courageous young reporter was without trouble admitted to an interview.

This encouraged him at once, and he boldly launched into a series of questions which might well have taxed the patience of a modern Job.

As he progressed Walter grew bolder, and had just asked a question which evoked such an answer as caused him the astonishment mentioned in the opening lines of our story.

"Where are you going with your new air-ship, Mr. Reade? What will be your first trip?"

Frank regarded the questioner for a moment keenly, and then replied:

"My first trip will be a long one. I am going to the end of the earth."

For a moment the reporter was too astonished to speak. When he recovered from his surprise ultimately, he said:

"To the end of the earth?"

"Just so."

"But—" stammered young May. "I can't say that I understand you. Do you mean that literally?"

"Quite literally," replied Frank.

Walter was puzzled.

"Well," he said after some thought, "I am aware that the ancients regarded the earth as a flat table, and that one might walk off its end into space, if he only walked far enough in one direction. But—I must say your statement confuses me. If we accept the truth that the earth is a sphere——"

"I accept it!" declared Frank.

"You do?"

"Yes!"

"Then—perhaps you can explain to me how you are going to carry out your project?"

"Certainly," replied Frank, calmly, "there is nothing in our ken save the atmosphere which is limitless. Even a perfect sphere must have an end."

"Whew!" exclaimed Walter, somewhat struck in a heap. "Your logic is too much for me, Mr. Reade. Of course, you are right. But to which end of the earth are you going, the upper or lower end; the east, west, north or south end?"

Both laughed at this.

Frank made reply:

"I am going to that part of the earth where civilization has never unbarred the doors of eternal solitude. Where even animal life is at its lowest ebb for lack of support. A region replete in death, for it has not the elements of life. Where only eternal cold and ice and bleak air and silence hold sway. Why is not that spot the end of the earth?"

Walter drew a long breath.

"Certainly it is," he replied, "but may I ask where that dreadful spot is?"

"Certainly! Thousands of lives have been sacrificed in the attempt to find it, but I am alone possessed of the power to become its discoverer!"

"You mean the Polar extremity?"

"I mean that spot where all the frigid elements of the universe are most intense. We call that unexplored part of the world the North Pole."

Walter hastened to write this down. His eyes shone like stars.

"To the end of the earth!" he exclaimed. "Ah, how I wish I was the fortunate visitant!"

Then he went on to ask other questions. In vain he tried to draw from Frank a description of the Rainbow.

The young inventor only smiled, and said:

"If you will be on hand next Wednesday at ten o'clock, you, with others, shall see the new air ship take its flight."

"I'll be here!" vowed Walter.

Then a colored man showed him the way out.

He was a comical little dandy, with a row of gleaming teeth and eyes brimful of mischief.

Pomp was his name, and he was an old and tried employee. He grinned as Walter tried to pump him, and retorted:

"Hi, sah, ain't got no right fo' to tell yo' anyfing, sah. Marse Frank, he am de one to tell, sah."

And Walter was obliged to be content with this.

At the yard gate he was met by a stocky, red-headed son of the Emerald Isle, Barney O'Shea by name.

"Shure, sor, niver a thing kin I tell yez about the new air-ship. Shure, yez must ask Misther Frank."

So the scribe went away without having his curiosity satisfied; but he wrote up a stirring article on the matter, which set the whole country agog with interest.

But the more Walter dwelt upon the wonderful project the more

interested he became, and the stronger was his desire to become one of the party.

But he could hardly muster up courage to ask the favor of Frank Reade, Jr. At least, he feared the refusal.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "It seems as if I must become one of the party. Really, it does."

So the amazement he experienced can hardly be imagined, when one day a letter was handed him which read as follows:

"DEAR MAY—I know well enough what is on your mind, and that you cannot screw up sufficient courage to ask the privilege of becoming one of our party. Now I propose to relieve you of that embarrassing task, by extending you a cordial invitation to accompany myself and Barney and Pomp to the end of the Earth. Be on hand Wednesday at ten sharp.

Yours ever,

"FRANK READE, JR."

For a moment young May's brain whirled. It was such a stroke of good fortune that he could hardly bring himself to realize it.

"Gee whizz!" he gasped, "that is too good to believe."

But there was no doubting the statement. There it was before him in black and white.

The day for the flight of the Rainbow came.

An immense crowd had gathered in Readestown to witness the ascension.

And an hour before the start, Frank Reade, Jr. opened the gates and admitted a few friends and press representatives to the yard, where the air-ship rested upon its stays, ready for the flight.

As thus revealed, it was seen to be a marvel of mechanical genius.

The spectators gazed at the inventive triumph with sheer amazement and spell-bound.

Perhaps the most interested one in the party was Walter May himself. He examined every part of the Rainbow carefully.

In shape she was long and narrow of beam with high bow and stern, not unlike an old-fashioned caravel.

It might be that this curved shape suggested her name, the "Rainbow." But her hull was a model of grace and beauty of outline.

The hull was of thin rolled but bullet proof aluminum. Above her main deck rose a cabin with windows of plate glass, and a door amidships.

A guard rail protected all the decks, and forward in the air-ship's bow was the pilot house.

Here were all the steering gear and electric key boards which controlled the air-ship. A great plate glass window was in front.

Three masts arose from the air-ship's deck. These were hollow and revolving with three huge rotascopes which, driven at full speed, furnished the supporting power of the air-ship.

At her stern was a huge propeller capable of terrific speed.

In general the Rainbow was constructed with a view to lightness, extreme buoyancy and yet steadfastness.

Frank had designed her to float in air like a feather. Yet with sufficient strength and stability to defy the most powerful gale.

So much for the exterior of the Rainbow. Now let us take a look at her interior.

It is here that we are more than ever impressed with the wonderful genius and forethought of the inventor.

The cabin of the air-ship was a literal revelation.

It was as daintily arranged as a ladies' boudoir. There were lounges and settees all richly upholstered, also book shelves, cabinets and the comforts which would come welcome to the aerial travelers when far from home.

Beyond the cabin was the dining salon and the galley over which Pomp presided as only he could.

Next came the daintily furnished staterooms. Then below decks were the engine and dynamo rooms.

Here was all the wonderful machinery which ran the boat and whose construction was one of Frank's secrets.

Not the least interested and enthusiastic of all was Walter May who could hardly contain himself.

"I can hardly believe my senses!" he exclaimed, in excess of delight. "Am I really to go with you on this trip, Frank?"

"Indeed, it is your choice," replied the young inventor, "if you want to go, though, you must be ready in another hour."

CHAPTER II.

THE ASCENSION.

"I AM ready now," declared Walter. "My traps are all aboard. Let her go at any time. Do you know what heaps of my friends in New York said?"

Frank looked interested, and the young reporter continued:

They said that I would rue the day. They were sure that the air-ship, like every other, would prove a fizzle and fall to the earth. I would be dashed to pieces. See?"

Frank laughed.

"Take the warning while yet in time," he said.

"Humph!" granted Walter, "don't think I'm such a fool. If I fall why you will fall too. I don't believe that you are such a fool as to throw your life away!"

"Well, hardly," agreed Frank. "If I thought the Rainbow would fall I wouldn't go up with her."

"That's it. I knew it. Well, I would rather die than miss the

chance of going, so it don't matter much anyway. Won't it be cold at the North Pole?"

"Just a little," said Frank, with a smile, "didn't you bring warm clothing?"

"Four overcoats and flannels!"

"That will hardly do. Only fur can resist the cold of the Arctic. But we have half a dozen fur suits aboard already. You shall have one."

"Thank you!"

The moment drew nearer for the start. Barney and Pomp could hardly contain themselves.

They were great jokers and fond of playing tricks upon each other. It was hard to say which generally came out best. It was really about an even thing.

"Begorra, naygur!" cried Barney, jostling Pomp in the ribs, "whin we git to the North Pole yez will be the biggest curiosity there."

"Wha' yo' mean by dat, I'ish?" asked Pomp, stiffly.

"Can't yez see? Ain't the counthry all snow and ice up there?"

"I reckon it am."

"Well, be jabbers av that's so yez figger fer yersilf. Snow an' ice is white. The Polar bear is white. Shure it's mesilf and Misther Frank an' his frind is white. Shure yez will be the only thing black up there!"

Pomp grunted and made a biff at the Celt with one hand. But the Irishman dodged and retreated to the pilot house.

He slammed the door which Pomp could not force.

"I lay fo' yo' when yo' come out, yo' I'ish muckah!" cried Pomp, angrily.

Of course Frank had seen nothing of the fracas, or he would have forbidden it. Just at this moment he was himself engrossed with an amusing affair.

While he was showing his friends about the air-ship, suddenly and without warning, a man came flying across the yard.

His manner was excited and almost maniacal. He was muttering wildly to himself.

In all their days the spectators had never seen such a quaint, curious looking individual.

He was tall and intensely angular, with cadaverous features, keen blue eyes, a tuft of red beard on his chin and long yellow hair.

He was dressed in a tall fuzzy hat, a long tailed coat of brown homespun, with huge silver buttons, striped drill trousers and heavy cowhide boots. He carried a prodigious carpet bag in his hand and a cotton umbrella large enough for a small tent.

"Hi, hil! Git out of my way, will yew, mister?" he blustered as he pushed several of the men aside and sprang on to the deck of the air-ship.

Then he dropped his carpet bag, whipped out a huge bandanna and began wiping his face vigorously, glaring about him excitedly the while.

Of course all regarded this apparition with amazement.

It was like a specter from the past. Had he announced himself as the spiritual representation of Jonas Todd, Uncle Sam, or some other Vermont Yankee celebrity, the crowd would have believed him.

Walter May was the first to recover himself.

"Jericho!" he gasped; "what has the wind blowed in now?"

Hello, my friend! Where did you come from?"

The newcomer turned to Walter, flaunted the tuft on his chin, and disregarding the question, asked:

"Kin any of you chaps tell me whar I kin find Mister Frank Reade, Jr.?"

There was silence for a moment.

Then Frank stepped forward.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr.," he said.

The new-comer gaped and stared and looked Frank up and down with sheer amazement.

"Yew!" he finally exclaimed. "Gosh blow it! yew ain't nuthin' but a boy."

Frank smiled.

"Well," he said. "What is your business with me?"

The stranger thrust his hands deep in his pockets and whistled Aunt Dinah. Then he tossed out a huge quid and said:

"If yew air Mister Reade then I've hit agin a stump. I heern tell of Frank Reade, Jr., the great inventor, an' I 'low I hed a powerful curiosity tew see him. I'm sumthin' of an inventor myself, but gosh blow me! I thought Frank Reade, Jr., was an old man."

"Well!" said Frank, tersely.

"I see ye ain't much more'n a boy, but that hain't yure fault, I reckon. Beg yure pardon, fer not introducin' myself afore this," with a sweeping bow. "I'm Jedediah Spruce, of Skittletown, Green Mountain County, Varmount, an' durn my necktie I've cum all ther way down hyar on ther keers an' run ther risk of running off ther track tew see yew."

By this time everybody was laughing. The true character of the new-comer was seen at once.

"By Jove!" whispered Walter, "I never saw anything like him out of a comic almanac. He's a typical Vermont Yankee."

Frank grasped the point and embraced the opportunity.

"Well, Mr. Spruce," he said genially, "I'm honored with your visit. How is everything up in Vermont?"

They shook hands, which appeared to delight Jedediah.

"Fair tew middlin', I reckon," he replied. "Sally Spriggs has got ther measles fer ther third time, and Bill Henderson's coon was knocked tew splinters by lightnin' last week."

"Pretty hard luck, eh?"

"Yas; but them Hendersons never did hev any luck. Naow there was nine on 'em—all boys—an' Jerry an' Hank an'—"

"Of course you had some object in view in honoring me with this visit, Mr. Spruce," interrupted Frank judiciously. "What can I do for you?"

"Wall," said Jedediah, swelling up. "I came daown tew see yure air-ship I heern tell so much abaout. I'm interested in all kinds of inventions, and when I wuz a boy sot out to be an inventor myself. Naow I've invented a new kind of boot-jack that'll take yure boots off an' put 'em on agin while yew wait. Yas, by gosh, and will gin 'em a good streakin' of taller tew at ther same time. Naow Square Parkins, he was Sister Hannah's fust cousin, he kinder thought thet some on these 'ere Wall street chaps mought water some stock an' make a fortin' out of the invention. Thar wuz Pete Squiggles got up a new milkin' stool and b'gosh got forty-nine dollars an' sixty tew an' a half cents for ther patent. Kain't say I'd sell my boot-jack for that, but howsumdover I'd like tew talk on it. Naow I've a durned liberal propersition tew make."

Jedediah cocked his hat on one side, accumulated a fresh quid of tobacco in one cheek and drew a billet of soft pine from his pocket and a jack-knife and began whittling industriously.

Frank and the others were nearly convulsed, and it was with difficulty that Frank kept a sober face.

"Well, friend Spruce," said Frank, "I always like to meet a brother inventor, out between you and I there is not any money in it. The inventing business is a pretty poor business. I think it would be better for you if you went back to Vermont and settled down on your farm. There are too many inventors in the country to-day. I am getting crowded out myself."

Jedediah's jaw fell.

"Yew don't say!"

"Yes, I do. Now, I'll take you over the air ship with pleasure, and presently you can witness the ascent. Then take the cars and go back to Vermont."

Jedediah was so impressed with this prosaic advice, that he actually swallowed his quid.

Then, with something like awe, he allowed himself to be showed over the air-ship by Frank.

When this ceremony was over, Frank shook his hand, and said:

"Good-day, Mr. Spruce."

But Jedediah stood on the deck and did not move. He shifted from one foot to the other awkwardly, and finally blurted out:

"B'gosh, I've got tew say it. I heard that yew was goin' tew the North Pole in an air-ship. Naow, Mr. Reade, I want tew go with yew!"

Frank was dismayed.

"No, no!" he said sharply and sternly, "that is impossible. I have all the people I can carry now."

"B'gosh, I'll turn over my boot-jack patent tew yew. Make yew a clean present of it."

Frank saw that a decisive move was the only one to make, and he had to almost force Jedediah from the deck.

"You must not delay us!" he cried sternly. "The ship is all ready to go. Stand aside!"

Lugubriously Jedediah was forced to join the circle about the air-ship. The workmen were busy liberating the anchor ropes.

Then the rotascopes began to buzz. A great cheer went up from the crowd.

The air-ship trembled like a thing of life. Then there was a moment of suspense.

A few skeptical ones muttered:

"She won't rise!"

But the next moment they saw their folly. With a sudden graceful motion the air-ship sailed upward.

Deafening cheers rent the air.

Then the crowd witnessed a thrilling act. All this while the Yankee, Jed Spruce, had stood disconsolately in the verge of the throng.

It was a terrible disappointment to him to see the air-ship sail away without him.

He was a resolute, daring fellow, and conceived a sudden, reckless plan.

"B'gosh, I'll hev a ride in the air anyway!" he muttered.

One of the anchor ropes dragged. As the air-ship sprang upward Jedediah grabbed it. In an instant he was dangling in mid air and whisked up a thousand feet from the earth.

As it happened none of those on board saw him. Those below could not, of course, make Frank comprehend the situation.

And there hung Jedediah betwixt heaven and earth.

CHAPTER III.

JEDEDIAH CARRIES HIS POINT.

THE Yankee was shrewd.

He knew of course that if he was seen or if he clambered aboard the air-ship now, he would simply be sent back to the earth again.

He was an expert climber so he went on up the rope until right under the keel.

And here he knotted the end of the rope up in such a manner that his weight was sustained easily and without strain on his arms.

Far above the clouds the Rainbow sailed.

And those on her deck little dreamed that she really carried an extra passenger.

It was evident that Jed Spruce was a man of more than ordinary nerve, or he could never have maintained his precarious position.

Meanwhile those on the air-ship's deck were enjoying the situation keenly.

It was a novel experience to Walter May, and he could hardly contain himself.

He paced the deck—was one moment forward, and then aft—scanned the earth intently and excitedly.

He saw Readestown become but a mere speck in the distance.

Woods and fields, rivers and lakes, hills and mountains—all faded into one common mass as the air-ship rose to its greatest height.

Then it shot into a cloud, and the earth was shut out entirely.

Walter drew a deep breath.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "This is an experience far beyond the powers of description! Indeed, Frank, you have accomplished a mighty feat."

"You may not feel quite so enthusiastic before the trip is over," ventured Frank.

"Why?"

"It is a good ways to the Pole, and we shall probably have many very perilous experiences."

"All the better," declared the young reporter confidently. "I assure you that is what I pray for."

"Why?"

"Oh, it will give me material for newspaper stories. I shall be in demand when I get back to New York."

"I hope you will," laughed Frank. "And I also hope you will get back to New York alive!"

"Oh, now you are trying to scare me!" said Walter, jocosely.

"Time will tell!"

With which Frank went into the cabin. Walter was reflective.

"Well," he muttered, finally, "maybe New York will never see Walter May again, but I will not be the first one who has immolated his life upon the altar of Arctic exploration."

Barney and Pomp were having a confab in the pilot house. Barney was regulating the speed of the air-ship.

"Begorra, naygur!" cried the Celt. "I'm afther thinkin' it's a pity Misher Frank didn't take that Yankee along wid us. Be me sowl he'd have med fun enuff fer the whole av us!"

"I reckon yo' am right, chile," agreed Pomp, "bat you an' I hain't got no bizness wif dat big Yankee!"

"Phwat do yez mean?"

"Jes' wha' I say, chile. He brek us in two like lily sticks. He am a berry muscularious man, I tell yo'."

"Bejabers, it's a good mon as breaks Barney O'Shea in two!" boasted the Celt.

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp.

Barney turned around.

"Phwat's that yez say?"

"Didn't say nuffin'."

"Yez didn't?"

"No, I jes' thought something."

"Yez thought somethin'! Phwat did yez think, yez black baboon?"

"If I tole yo' dat it might hurt yo' feelings, sah."

"Yez needn't be afraid av that. Shure there's not the size in yez to do that."

"Ain't so suah ob dat. But I tole yo' wha' I fink. I done believe dat Yankee lick yo' wif his lily finger."

Barney puffed and wheezed indignantly at this asseveration.

"Praps yez wud loike to take his place, naygur!" he blustered. "Bejabers, say the worrud!"

"Don't yo' be so anxious," said Pomp coolly. "Jes' yo' wait until we gits on de ground agin. I'se got one laid up fo' yo'."

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, "there's no toime loike the prisint. Mebbe we'll never get down to the earth agin. Yez had better make use av yure prisint oppochunity."

"Tut, tut, enough of that," came a stern voice from below, for Frank had heard all. "You rascals will be quarreling yet."

Pomp skipped into the galley and gave Barney's portion of the con-somme an extra dash of red pepper by way of a small revenge.

Then presently all came down to dinner. It was the first meal aboard the air ship.

It was served up finely by Pomp, and all partook of it heartily.

The voyage was inaugurated propitiously. The air-ship held a steady northward course until dark.

"To-morrow," said Frank, "we shall be over Canadian soil."

"Hurrah!" cried Walter. "Won't it be something to say that we have been to the end of the earth?"

When night came the air-ship rode high above a bank of fleecy clouds.

The search-light sent its lightning rays flashing through this.

It must have been a beautiful meteoric exhibition to wondering people on the earth below.

Probably few of them guessed the truth of its cause.

It was arranged that Barney and Pomp should alternately keep watch nights.

The air ship's speed was to be reduced to a fraction of the ordinary article. Thus all plans were made.

Frank and Walter finally retired. It was Pomp's first watch.

Just after midnight the darky was aft when he heard a peculiar scraping sound against the ship's side.

Then—could he believe his senses? Over the rail there clambered the form of a man.

The darky's wool literally rose and his eyes seemed likely to leap from their sockets.

"Massy Lordy!" he gasped. "Wha' de debbil am dat? Am it a ghost?"

All negroes are grossly superstitious. Pomp was no exception.

For the moment he saw in the intruder a ghost. What else could it be, he reflected?

What human being could come up from the earth and clamber aboard in such a fashion?

It was certainly a supernatural affair. The darky was literally paralyzed with terror.

His knees trembled, and great beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. He gasped and trembled and whimpered.

But only for a moment.

Then there came a revelation.

His fears fled.

The supposed ghost drew his lanky form up, and said with a nasal twang:

"B'gosh! I hed reckoned that I'd never git aboard av this craft one while. I'll be goldurned if my legs don't ache like a house afire. Hello, mister, yew see I wanted tew go along tew the North Pole pooty bad!"

"Golly!" gasped Pomp, "wha' de debbil am yo' here fo'? Where did yo' come from?"

"Where du yew 'spose?" retorted the Yankee, tartly.

"Yo' didn't fly up here, sah!"

"Haw—haw! Wall, no, not exactly. Hain't got tew be a cherub yit. But I'm tarnal hungry an'—"

"Hol' on dar, honey!" cried Pomp, "if yo' done tell me how yo' got heah, I gib yo' suffin' to eat."

"Yew bet I'm yure huckleberry," replied the Yankee. "Wall, when the air-ship went up I grabbed a rope and went up tew. I hev bin hangin' tew ther bottom of this gol durned craft ever since, an' I'm nigh beat out."

Pomp saw the truth at once. He was intensely amazed.

"Yo' hab bin hangin' dar all day?" he asked.

"Thet's right, yu bet."

"Golly! wha' will Marse Frank say?"

With one stride the Yankee had the darky by the throat. He was a literal giant.

"Look here, yu black cloud," he roared. "I know durned well what he'll say. He'll put me daown onto the ground. But I ain't goin' thar, see? Yew may say yure prayers if yew don't agree to keep mum."

"Yep—yes!" spluttered Pomp.

"Arter we git up inter ther ice regions he kain't drop me. Then I'm in fer it. I'll dew as much fer yew, if yew'll help me, nigger!"

Pomp was really in sympathy with the Yankee. Both he and Barney had been anxious that he should become a passenger.

So he spluttered:

"A'right, honey! I'll help yo' all I can. But yo' mus' keep berry close!"

"Yew bet I will!"

"De bes' fing yo' kin do is to hide fo' a while, sah!"

"All right, my friend. Yew kin tell me the best place!"

"I kin jes' do dat!"

And so the arrangement was made. It began to look as if Jed Spruce was also destined to visit the North Pole.

Of course, had Frank been aware of his presence aboard at that particular moment, there is no doubt but that he would have dropped the Yankee without delay.

But Barney and Pomp kept the secret well.

For days Jed Spruce remained securely hidden in the hold of the air-ship.

Then one day, when the air-ship hung over a wild part of British Columbia, Mr. Spruce walked boldly out.

Frank and Walter were on the after deck, and their astonishment cannot be expressed in words.

It was as if they had seen a ghost.

But Jed was equal to the occasion.

He walked up nonchalantly and extended his hand.

"Howdy, Mister Reade! Didn't jest expect to see me here, did yew?"

"You!" gasped Frank. "What the deuce does this mean?"

"Wall, it means thet I'm with yew fer keeps," said Mr. Spruce, confidently.

"Where did you come from?"

"Ther same place yew did, b'gosh!"

"Yes—but how did you come aboard this air-ship?" spluttered Frank, angrily.

With this the Yankee told the entire story of his exploit. He took care, however, not to implicate Barney or Pomp.

"Yew see I'm in it fer keeps," he declared, triumphantly. "Yew kain't put me overboard in this wild kentry. It would be murder."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEAR HUNT.

At first Frank was inclined to be very angry.

But Walter laughed.

"If that's not a Yankee trick I never heard of one!" he cried, "he's got the best of you, Frank!"

"Yes—but—I never gave you permission!" stormed Frank. "I can't take you to the North Pole with me!"

"Naow look hyar, Mister Reade," argued the Yankee, "I kin make it tew yure advantage. I'm a durnation good worker an' yew've only tew tell me what tew do and b'gosh it'll be done. It'll be tew yure advantage an' mine."

The fellow's manner was so earnest and persuasive that Frank's anger was turned aside.

But he was determined to give the fellow a bit of a scare, anyway. So he turned to Barney and said sternly:

"Lower the air-ship, Barney!"

The Celt stood a moment in surprise. Then he hastened to obey the order.

The Yankee turned pale.

His knees began to shake.

Did the young inventor really mean to dump him in this out of the way, God forsaken part of the world?

It looked that way.

"Whew!" he muttered, turning to Pomp, "the ba'rs an' Injuns will eat me up if I git down thar!"

"Golly! I is sorry fo' you!" declared the darky, honestly.

"Yew don't s'pose he reely means it?"

"Neber knowed Marse Frank to go back on his wo'd yit."

Down sank the air-ship.

It was indeed a wild region which lay below. The air-ship alighted upon a rocky eminence.

It was doubtful if human beings had ever made an abode in those parts unless it might be possibly roving bands of Indians.

Jedediah was like one sitting on hot coals. Frank threw the rope ladder over the rail.

"Good-day, Mr. Spruce," he said. "I hope you will have a pleasant walk home."

Cold perspiration stood out on the Vermonter's brow.

"Gosh all Peter!" he exclaimed tremblingly. "Yew ain't goin' tew put me out hyar?"

"That is just what I'm going to do!" said Frank sternly.

Then Jedediah began to beg.

"Tain't human in ye!" he cried. "It's daownright murder! I niver cud git home in a hundred years. I swan to man, I'll jest die if yew put me off here!"

"Begorra, Misther Frank," ventured Barney, "I'll let the poor divil slape in my bunk if yez will lave him be!"

"You scamp!" cried Frank with mock anger, "I believe you are in the conspiracy!"

Barney swore by all that was sacred that this was impossible.

"It's not so, sor!" he cried. "Shure I'd niver use me impl'yer so mean as all that!"

"I never knew you to be false to me," agreed Frank, "but I believe it was a put up job to secrete this fellow on board."

Barney and Pomp protested. The Yankee disavowed their complicity.

Frank was satisfied.

"Well, friend Spruce," he said, ironically. "You will have to work your passage if you go with us. Get a mop and slush the deck."

Jedediah bit off a hunk of tobacco.

"Whar's yer durned old mop?" he roared. "I'll dew anything yew say, capting. I'm no Jonah."

And Jedediah was as good as his word.

Frank's purpose in landing in this out-of-the-way place was really not to deport Jedediah, but to indulge in a bear hunt.

He knew that this part of British Columbia was the stronghold of the grizzly bear.

That there were plenty of the savage monsters in the vicinity he felt sure. Now if there was sport in anything it was in shooting grizzlies.

So he called for his Winchester and said:

"I want two men to go with me. May, you can be one, and I think I will name Barney for the other."

The chosen men were delighted.

This left Jedediah and Pomp to remain as guards aboard the air-ship. But they did not demur.

Preparations were soon made.

Armed with Winchesters and big knives, the two bear hunters let themselves down from the air-ship's deck.

Frank led the way and they were soon clambering over the great ledges and in quest of bear signs.

It was not long before they discovered them. Barney was the first to do this.

He found the imprint of a grizzly's foot in some soft dirt. Then a little beaten path was found.

This undoubtedly led to the bear's den, and was probably used by the brutes in going after water. A little pool visible below strengthened this assumption.

As it became apparent that they were close upon the scent, the excitement of the hunters increased greatly.

"It will be necessary to use great caution now," said Frank, "the grizzly is a very astute foe."

"Had we not better separate?" asked Walter.

"Eventually!" replied Frank, "but not at present. Proceed as silently as possible."

"Begorra, there's no danger but that I'll be ready, sor!" declared Barney, with a shiver, "it runs in the blood av the O'Sheas to be afraid av bears!"

Frank and Walter laughed at this. The next moment the first of a thrilling train of incidents happened.

They were skirting a heap of bowlders and clambering through a mass of creeping vines which completely matted the ledge.

Suddenly Barney put his foot on a section of the vines and then—as if by magic he vanished.

The vines had sprung back into place and concealed his disappearance as effectually as could be imagined.

For a moment neither Frank nor Walter could move or speak.

As Barney vanished he gave a sharp cry, but it was smothered the next moment.

"Mercy!" finally gasped Walter. "Where has he gone, Frank?"

With an effort Frank recovered himself.

"Quick!" he cried. "Don't you see that he has fallen into some sort of a pit or cavity? We must save him!"

"A pit!" gasped Walter. "I don't see any such thing!"

"No, but it is there, just the same!"

"Invisible?"

"Yes. The vines cover it up."

Walter was mystified, but Frank instantly went to work to locate the aperture into which Barney had fallen.

That it was a deep one, he knew well enough, from the fact that nothing more was heard from the Celt.

He at once began tearing the vines away excitedly.

They were densely matted and hard to clear, but Frank used his hunting knife with such effect, that finally he was able to lay bare the hole in the ledge.

It was a cleft in the rock, and its depths could not be penetrated for the dense gloom.

But Frank shouted:

"Hello! Are you there, Barney? Answer, if you can!"

But no answer came back.

Only a hollow echo.

Frank was aghast.

"My soul!" he exclaimed. "I'm afraid that's the end of the Irishman. The pit may be a hundred feet deep and he probably has fallen onto jagged rocks!"

"How horrible!" exclaimed Walter. "What shall we do, Frank?"

For a moment the young inventor was at a loss for an answer.

Then he said:

"I will at least throw some light upon the dark hole!"

He drew a small box from his pocket. It contained a coil of wire, a small storage battery and an incandescent globe.

It was but a moment to produce a light with these. Frank lowered the globe into the place.

Down it went for a dozen feet. Then the jagged hole took a slant beyond which nothing could be seen.

Frank saw the point at once.

Barney doubtless had struck the shelving descent and been rendered senseless, his body rolling on down to the bottom of the pit.

The two men exchanged glances.

The same thought was in the mind of each.

"Let me go down!" said Walter.

"No!" said Frank, "but I must ask of you to remain here until I return or give signal."

"Certainly!"

"I am going to bring Barney back dead or alive. I hope the latter for he is too valuable a man to lose!"

"You are right," agreed Walter. "I shall stay here subject to your orders!"

Frank uncoiled a lariat from his lip. It was fortunate that he had provided himself with this.

He took a turn with the noose about a spur of rock. Then he threw the other end down into the pit.

The next moment he was going down deftly hand over hand.

In a few moments he reached the slant and then slid from view. For a time the rope vibrated.

Then it ceased.

Time passed.

Walter waited patiently for a signal. But it came not. He began to wax uneasy.

"That's queer," he muttered finally. "I wonder if anything has happened to him."

He was at a loss to know what to do.

He thought of returning to the air-ship for aid. But he dared not do this, for fear a signal might come, and his services be at once needed.

So he waited.

And as time went on the situation began to look desperate. Cold sweat oozed from his pores.

"My soul!" he reflected, "perhaps they are desperately in want of help. I ought to go down, but—"

He wisely reflected that if he should go down and fall to come up, those on board the air-ship could never find trace of them.

Yet something must be done.

This was clear.

"I am going down!" Walter finally muttered. "I will use every precaution. It is the only way."

Without further hesitation he swung over the verge and slid down the lariat.

CHAPTER V.

WALTER'S PLUCKY FEAT.

It certainly was a nery thing in Walter to descend into the unknown pit where for aught he knew Frank and Barney had lost their lives.

He was obliged to plunge into deep gloom for he had no light. But he hoped to find Frank by means of the electric globe.

He slid down slowly, pausing to listen.

At times he shouted, but got no answer. Then he slid on.

He reached the point where the passage shelved and slid over this. He felt the descent become abrupt again.

Then he looked down.

There was a light below.

It was the electric globe. He saw the wire hanging over a spur of rock. What was more he saw a small chamber in the solid rock with passages leading in various directions.

Walter paused and hanging in mid-air wondered if it would be safe to go down into the chamber.

He looked in vain for some sign of Barney and Frank. And as he did so he was given a great start.

Upon the cavern floor he saw a rifle. It was shattered and twisted, and, as near as his eyesight could be trusted, lay in a pool of blood.

Horror seized the young explorer.

For a moment he was in danger of falling, so shocked were his nerves.

And there was little wonder.

It seemed certain that some sort of a fracas had taken place there. But what was it?

What mysterious power had pounced upon and destroyed the two unfortunate men?

For Walter could not but believe that such had been the case. His soul was flooded with horror.

He clung to the lariat and tried to think out a good plan of action. This was not easy.

If he should reascend the lariat and return to the air-ship for assistance he would be leaving his friends to their certain fate, if they were by any possibility yet alive.

A sudden daring resolution seized him. Walter was a youth of nerve.

He drew his knife and placed it between his teeth. Then he muttered:

"I am going down there if I die for it! I must know the fate of my friends. It would be cowardly for me to leave them here."

With which resolution he slid down the lariat.

When his feet touched the cavern floor he braced himself, half expecting an attack.

But none came.

There was not a human being or beast in sight. All was the silence of the tomb.

But the place bore evidences of a terrific struggle.

There were pools of blood on the stone floor, shreds of clothing, and the smashed rifle.

The young explorer noted all this and more. He saw a trail of blood which led into a corridor before him.

He took the battery and wire with the globe and proceeded to follow it.

He had proceeded not ten yards when he came upon the explanation. A huge dark form lay upon the floor of the passage.

It was the dead form of a grizzly.

Its shaggy coat was soaked in blood and was rent with great knife strokes. It required nothing further for the young reporter to read the truth.

In his momentary excitement he pulled out his notebook and began to write down a hypothesis of the affair.

"The Irishman, Barney, dropped unceremoniously into this bear's den. At once a struggle followed. It must have been hand to hand and a terrible one.

"The Irishman finally conquered, but was doubtless pursued by other grizzlies into the depths of the cavern. Mr. Reade arriving here, found this same conclusion and has either fled into the cavern pursued by a bear, or has gone to search for Barney."

This jotted down, the reporter mused further:

"This was not all. They have probably lost their way in this labyrinth. Their peril is of the deadliest sort, for the bears with their scent can trace them anywhere and doubtless will do so. The result will be that they will be likely to get hemmed in and overcome."

This deduction made, the young reporter began hastily to consider what it was best to do.

He was inclined to in turn go in search of his companions, and if possible give them aid.

He would not for a moment believe that anything had happened to them, and but that they were alive.

So he had half decided upon this move, when an incident decided him perforce.

This was the sudden sound of shambling footsteps, and he saw with a thrill a brutish hairy face appear in the gloom of an opposite passage.

Walter had slung his rifle over his back.

He now quickly unslung this. He knew the necessity of terminating the existence of the animal at once.

So he quickly examined the magazine, and then without hesitation aimed at the grizzly.

He had no desire of coming to close quarters, and was anxious, if possible, to bring the monster down with a single shot.

So he aimed with great deliberation and care. His eyesight was of the best and aided him.

He knew the folly of firing directly at the brute's skull, for it would deflect the bullet easily enough.

Again to fire at its body was exceedingly risky, for some fleshy part or the muscles might prevent the ball from reaching a vital part. So Walter adopted what he believed was the best move, and aimed directly for the bear's eye.

This glistened like a ball of fire in the gloom. It was a small mark and Walter was not a crack marksman.

But he was satisfied to take the chance and did so. Steadily aiming, he pulled the trigger.

Crack!

The bullet struck the brute full in the eye. It was the luckiest of shots. It penetrated the brain.

The big brute howled once, then staggered forward and fell at full length dead in an instant.

For a moment Walter could hardly believe his good fortune.

His heart beat like a trip-hammer and his muscles seemed to lose their power. But he was not long in recovering.

"By Jupiter!" he muttered, "that's the best shot I ever made in my life. Aimed for the eye and hit it square."

It required but a glance to satisfy him that the bear was dead. Then he picked up the electric globe and began to track Frank and Barney.

This was not difficult as they had left a trail of blood behind them. Following this for a long ways it suddenly ceased and Walter was at a loss to know what move to make.

While in this quandary he suddenly raised his voice and shouted:

"Hello, Frank Reade, Jr. if you are in hearing, answer!"

Again and again he shouted. Then his nerves tingled.

An answer came.

It was faint and distant but intelligible. It was Frank's voice.

"Hello!"

Without waiting for more the young reporter dashed away down the passage. He shouted as he ran.

The answers became every moment nearer. Then suddenly footsteps were heard, and Frank's voice:

"Is that you, May?"

"Yes," replied the reporter. "I came down to find you. What on earth has happened?"

"The worst I fear!" replied Frank. "I have searched everywhere for Barney and cannot find him."

"Mercy! did he fall a victim to the bears?"

"I fear so. I found evidence of a struggle in the pit and then a blood trail. Probably the bears have dragged him away to some distant part of their den!"

"To make a meal of him?"

"Yes!"

Aghast with the full horror of the thing the two men for a time looked silently at each other.

After a time Walter said:

"Poor Barney! What a terrible fate!"

"But it may be that he is yet alive!" cried Frank, feverishly. "I am in hopes to find him and save him yet. Bears frequently drag their prey into their den and keep them alive for days."

"God, grant it may be so!" cried Walter, fervently.

Then both set out upon the trail. For hours, by the light of the electric globe, they followed from one passage to another.

The mountain seemed honey-combed with passages. Into which of these Barney had been dragged they could only guess.

But suddenly their quest met with material results. Walter, who was in the lead, suddenly paused.

"Listen," he whispered.

Both heard a distant panting sound, alternated with whining, such as might be made by cubs.

"I have it!" gasped Frank; "the old grizzly has dragged Barney in to make food for her cubs!"

This proved true.

A few steps further and they saw bright balls of light in the darkness—the eyes of the bears.

Also an ominous growl came from the she-bear. Instinctively Walter's rifle went to his shoulder.

But Frank restrained him.

"Wait!" he said.

"Why?"

"It is dangerous!"

"Dangerous?"

"Yes. You might hit Barney instead of the old bear."

"True," exclaimed Walter. "Perhaps he is conscious. Speak to him."

Frank raised his voice:

"Barney!" he cried.

To his amazement an answer came. It was a hoarse moan. The two rescuers were so excited that they knew not what to do.

It was truly a question how to rescue the Celt from his position.

The old bear was growling fiercely, and seemed inclined to come out to the attack.

But this was just what the rescuers wanted.

"Get her out if you can," said Frank. "Can't you throw the rays of the light further into the place?"

"I'll try," declared Walter, and he advanced almost to the mouth of the hole. The next moment a blow from the darkness knocked the globe from his hand, and he felt himself in the embrace of the bear.

CHAPTER VI.

POMP MAKES ACTION.

THAT moment might have been Walter's last but for his presence of mind.

He responded to the embrace of the bear so closely that she could not use her jaws on him.

Then he planted his knife in her ribs.

But Frank Reade, Jr., turned the tables in an instant.

Springing forward, he placed the muzzle of his rifle against the bear's ear and fired.

The huge brute with a howl of agony reeled, made some futile blows with her paws and fell.

The struggle was ended, and the white men were the victors.

In a moment they dashed into the den.

The cubs were easily dispatched.

Barney lay in a heap against the cavern wall.

But he aroused and was able to sit up, though somewhat dazed.

Explanations were quickly made.

When he fell into the pit, as has been guessed, it was to be immediately pounced upon by the she-bear.

She had dealt him a stunning blow over the head and dragged him senseless away. Otherwise, save for some teeth marks in his shoulder, he was unhurt.

When Frank descended to his rescue he had been instantly attacked by a male grizzly.

A desperate encounter resulted in his killing the brute; but another chased him for some ways into the passages.

This may have been the beast with which Walter had the encounter. However it was, they had vanquished the grizzlies, and beyond Barney's injuries, which were not serious, were ready to return to the air-ship.

But now the question arose as to how they were to find their way back.

They were in a total labyrinth, and knew not which way to turn. However, they set out at random.

After hours of wandering they came suddenly out into the open air.

This was at a point upon the mountain side not far from the summit.

It was midnight.

All this while they had spent in the aimless wandering underground. But it was not extremely dark, nor were they far from the locality of the air-ship.

They at once set out for it. But even as they drew near the spot, they were impressed with a startling fact.

The Rainbow was no longer there. The air-ship was gone. They were left alone—apparently deserted in the wilderness.

Left aboard the air-ship, Pomp and Jedediah had waited long and anxiously for the return of the hunting party.

But when time passed and they came not, Pomp grew worried.

"Golly!" he exclaimed. "Wha' can de mattah be? Mebbe de bears hab eat dem up?"

"B'gosh yu're right thar," agreed Spruce. "Darned if I ever liked tew fule with a b'ar anyway."

"Wha' am we bettah do?"

Spruce meditated a moment and then made reply:

"Gol darn me fer a clam, but I reckon we kain't do anything. If ther durned b'ars hev eat 'em up, that settles it. If they hain't why then they're jist as able tew git back as we air tew go arter them."

With which logical decision Jed walked away. Pomp was for a moment dumb. Perhaps the Yankee was right.

But he would not believe it yet. To give Frank and his companions up was not Pomp's purpose.

As nightfall came at last he muttered with confidence:

"I'se dead suah dey wouldn't stay away fer so long as dis if some-fin' wasn't wrong. I jes' fluk I go out to look aftah 'em."

With which conclusion he walked over to where Spruce sat with his feet on the rail and smoking a pipe.

"Look yer, mister," said Pomp, brusquely, "kin yo' do me a favah?"

"Wall," said Jed, laconically, "fust tell me the size of it."

"Yo' mus' stay yer an' watch while I goes out to try an' fin' out wha' am de mattah wif dem peoples."

Jed was reflective a moment.

"Tain't a bit er use," he said, curtly.

"Wha' am dat?" exclaimed Pomp, in astonishment.

"I say it's durned foolishness! They'll come back when they git reddey, an' yew kin bet yare pumpkins on it!"

"Huh!" muttered Pomp, not at all disconcerted, "jes' de same I'se gwine ter feel bet ah ter go out an' look fo' 'em. Does yo' see?"

"All hunky, mister," replied the Yankee nonchalantly, "but who in tarnation will I leave hyar when I go aout tew hunt fer yew?"

It was certainly a pertinent question. For a moment it staggered Pomp. Then he managed to say:

"I'se gwine to come back."

"Yew air, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, I reckon that ther others intend to. But s'posin' yer can't? What then, b'gosh?"

"Den yo' no need to bother yo' head about any ob us. Yo' can go on to de end ob de earth wifout us."

And the darky grinned.

This settled the matter.

"All hunk!" grunted the Yankee. "I'm a durned good hand tew obey orders."

A moment later, Pomp with his rifle had left the air-ship. He started to find the trail.

For a time it was not difficult to follow.

Then darkness and the character of the ground destroyed the marks. He was obliged to trust to guess work.

This was far from satisfactory. Indeed a serious calamity overtook him.

While engaged in the search he lost his bearings. Where he was he could not tell to save his life.

He in vain tried to locate himself or the air-ship.

"Golly!" he muttered after a while as a cold sweat broke out over him. "I done believe I'se lost!"

And indeed this was true. It was not a pleasant reflection.

For hours he wandered about at random. Then he came suddenly to a familiar spot.

In fact it was the very spot he had started from. But—where was the air-ship?

It was gone!

Pomp made dead sure of the location by making a careful examination. Then he became satisfied of the appalling truth that the air-ship was gone.

His kinky wool fairly stood on end. What did it mean?

In that moment he could see but one explanation. The Yankee had taken him literally at his word, and upon his non-return, after some hours, had departed alone with the air ship for the North Pole.

The possibility of the thing gave Pomp the shivers.

"Fo' goodness sake!" he gasped, "was he sich a bo'n fool as dat? Fo' Hebben's sake, hab he done left us?"

The air ship was gone and so was Jedediah. Here was evidence prima facie.

For a few moments the darky was overwhelmed.

Then he heard voices.

Some one was coming up the mountain. Not knowing but that the new-comers were foes, Pomp hid.

But as they drew nearer he heard them conversing, and knew that it was his friends.

They had also discovered the disappearance of the air-ship, and were dismayed. Pomp could stand it no longer. He sprang out of his concealment.

"Marse Frank," he cried, wildly, "I jes' knowed yo' cum back alibe. Dis chile am so glad to see yo'."

"Pomp," cried Frank, "is that you?"

"It am, sah!"

"Where is the air-ship?"

For a moment the darky was dumb. Then he exploded:

"It am gone, sah, wif dat Yankee abo'd fo' de Norf Pole wifout us."

Frank could hardly believe his senses.

"To the North Pole?" he gasped. "What do you mean, you rascal?"

Then Pomp told the story.

The explorers were aghast.

It seemed certain that the Yankee had, indeed, been guilty of such a dishonorable deed.

Left alone as they were in this howling wilderness the situation was not of the most cheerful.

"My soul!" exclaimed Walter. "We are in a bad scrape, Frank!"

"It seems so."

"Who would have thought that Yankee was treacherous."

"It cannot be possible."

"Yet what are we to believe?"

Frank shook his head.

"There is something wrong," he declared. "I can't say what it is just yet, but we shall learn."

Camp was made on the spot.

A fire was started, but there was no sleep for the excited voyagers that night. They spent the most of their time watching the sky.

Frank was unable to understand the situation.

He could not really believe that Jedediah had actually departed with the air-ship.

There must be some mistake.

And yet there was no apparent reason why the air-ship should not be found where he had left it, unless indeed the Yankee had departed for other regions.

Pomp was certain of this.

"I tole yo' he am gone to de Norf Pole fo' suah," he declared. "Neber did like his looks nohow."

The situation was by no means a reassuring or pleasant one. Frank was at a loss to know what to do.

They were in the heart of British Columbia and hundreds of miles from any human habitation or settlement.

To attempt to make their way back to civilization on foot, seemed a hopeless task.

The terrible perils of the wilderness formed a gauntlet which was surely not lightly to be run.

Yet to remain where they were was certainly impracticable. They must certainly starve.

"It's a tough outlook, Frank!" agreed Walter, in dismay. "I don't see much chance for us."

"Begorra, I wish I had that Yankee by the heels," averred Barney. "Shure, I'd fetch him back quick enough."

"Golly! dat wouldn't do any good unless you brought back de air-ship too!" said Pomp.

But just at that moment a great cry escaped the lips of them all. It was a cry of amazement.

And the spectacle which they beheld was certainly one well calculated to excite them.

CHAPTER VII.

JEDEDIAH'S EXPERIMENT.

JEDEDIAH, left aboard the air-ship, was disposed to regard the expedition of Pomp as a foolish resort.

"Gol durn my noddle!" he muttered. "I kain't see how he's goin' tew find them people, an' if he does, what good it will do him."

He reckoned that the bear hunters, if alive, were certainly able to get back to the air-ship. At least he could see no other or better way than to wait for them.

"That wuz the orders," he muttered, "an' durned if I don't believe it's best tew obey orders."

It must be admitted that there was a certain amount of logic in Jedediah's view of the case.

He waited a long while for Pomp to return.

He was naturally cool and nerry, but the darky's absence worried him.

"Durned if I know what tew dew," he muttered.

And indeed it was a perplexing question. The fate of his companions was the subject of much wonderment and alarm to him.

But what should he do?

If he set forth to find them the chances were that he might lose his way. Doubtless they had all lost their way.

Beyond a doubt this was the real cause of all the trouble. They were unable to find their way back to the air-ship.

And this suggested an idea to him.

"Durn my boots," he muttered, "if I wuz dead sure they'd be lookin' up I'd jist raise ther air-ship up intew ther sky a bit whar they cud see it. Then with that searchlight I'd be likely tew give 'em more help then in any other way."

The more he reflected upon the matter, the better satisfied he became that it was the proper thing to do.

But there was an obstacle.

He was not quite sure that he knew how to work the key-board. He had seen the engines manipulated, but was not sure that he could remember exactly how it was done.

However, he was not the one to be easily thwarted, so he went into the pilot-house.

Now, as Jedediah had said, he was something of an inventor himself.

He was remarkably ingenious and acute, and proceeded to study out the key board with infinite care.

But the more he studied over it, the more puzzled he became.

"Durn my old coat," he muttered, "thet Frank Reade, Jr., was a long-headed chap, warn't he? I never seen sich a complicated affair in my life!"

And it was not long before the Yankee was bound to admit himself defeated. He could not begin to fathom the key board as he had hoped.

But he was a resolute chap, and once undertaking a thing was bound not to yield to defeat.

But while studying the combination on the electric key board, a curious mishap befell.

By some curious chance he pressed a certain key, which he never dreamed of as the rotoscope key.

Suddenly the air-ship gave a lurch, there was a buzzing of the rotoscope, and Jedediah gave a yell of triumph.

The air-ship shot up into the sky. Up it went for a thousand feet. This was as far as the key was registered for it to ascend.

And there it hung.

Jedediah rushed out on deck, all excitement.

"Hooray!" he shouted. "Hyar we are right up in full sight, but—"

His jaw fell.

The air-ship hung in space, but it did not hang motionless by any means.

A powerful current of air began to carry it to the north.

It was rapidly leaving the mountain behind.

This would never do.

"By ginger," gasped Jedediah; "I'm stuck naow! How in blazes am I tew stop the tarnal thing? Gosh all Christmas, I've put my fat in it now!"

He rushed back to the pilot house and to the keyboard again.

Once more he tried to study it out and find the propeller combination, but it was a Greek puzzle.

He was in horror and dismay. Every moment the air-ship was getting further away.

"B'gosh! they'll think I've run off with ther golblamed ship on purpose," he muttered.

But what was to be done?

Jedediah was frantic.

How he regretted now that he had attempted to monkey with the keyboard at all.

"I'm a durned fule!" he muttered. "I've spiled their chances an' mine tew. What am I goin' tew dew?"

The more he reflected the more puzzled and desperate he became.

"Confound their thing!" he muttered at length in desperation.

"I've jest got tew stop it in some way!"

Then a happy thought came to him.

He rushed to the anchor ropes and let the anchors down. Alas! the elevation was too great!

They would not reach the ground.

"Wall, I'll be gol bowed!" muttered Jed. "Thar's jest one thing I kin do, an' thet's all."

With which he darted into the pilot-house again. He selected the key which he had pressed before, and, studying the combination again, tried it.

To his relief the air-ship began to descend.

There was below in the forest a little clearing. By a lucky chance the air-ship descended into this.

When it rested on the ground Jed threw over the anchors and then drew a deep breath.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "I'm durned glad thet I've got her down agin. I've gone an' made a durned fule of myself!"

He was now wholly at a loss what move to make.

He was half tempted to return to the mountain. One moment this seemed the best course. But to do so he must leave the air-ship and proceed on foot.

This would be risky and uncertain to say the least.

At length he abandoned the project as impracticable.

There was no sleep for him that night. But just before dawn when the hour seemed the darkest an idea came to him.

Far in the zenith hung a dark cloud. Jed went forward to the search-light.

He had seen this worked often enough to be able to understand it. He now turned the valve and sent the rays up against the cloud.

It was his hope that this would be a signal which the lost explorers would see and understand.

It proved a happy thought and was really the saving of the day.

It was the appearance of this light, reflected against the cloud which had given them the thrill of surprise with which the previous chapter closed.

The light was instantly comprehensive. They knew that it could come from nothing but the search-light.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Walter. "there is the air-ship!"

"Where?" asked Frank.

"That light comes from her."

"True—but where is she?"

This was for a moment a puzzle. Then Frank, after studying the cloud a moment, cried:

"That is a reflection from below. She is yet on the ground."

"I have it!" cried Walter. "Jed has shifted his position, probably thinking he can find us the easier."

"In that case it will be easy to locate the air-ship. Barney, get up into that tree and see if you can see her position."

"All right, sor."

Barney was a good climber.

He went up the tall pine like a monkey. When he had reached a point sufficient to overlook the country about he saw far below in the forest the circle of light which hung about the air-ship.

He set a course for it with a compass. Then he slid down to the ground.

"Exactly on a north-east line," cried Frank. "Come on boys, we can soon reach it."

With this they all set out through the forest. It was no light work plodding through the deep underbrush.

But they kept on.

Daylight had begun to appear when suddenly Pomp's loud hullo was answered. A few moments later they came into the clearing.

There was Jedediah by the air-ship's rail. Words cannot describe his sensations at that moment.

He was without doubt the most delighted Yankee in the Universe. He quickly told his story.

Frank could give him no words of blame, for he felt sure that Jed had done the best he could under very trying circumstances.

It did not take them long to get established again aboard the air-ship.

"I've had all the bear-hunting I want for one while," said Frank.

"So have I!" agreed Walter.

Pomp prepared a most appetizing meal to which all did justice.

Then once more the air-ship was on its way to the northern regions. This time Frank was determined to make no stop.

Over the regions of British Columbia the air-ship flew.

On toward the wild and desolate northern country. Every day the scenery underwent a change.

The great forests and fertile plains were succeeded by great wastes of arid land and marshes, with peat bogs and scrubby woods.

The air grew rapidly more chilly, and to the northward were snow-capped mountains.

"It really begins to look as if we were approaching the end of the earth," declared Walter.

"You are right," agreed Frank, "if the earth has an end anywhere it must be in this direction."

The air-ship was sailing along at an elevation of about two hundred feet above the earth.

For weeks nothing had been seen of a human habitation.

But now suddenly Walter gave a cry. This called all to the rail.

"Look!" he cried, "is not that a village?"

Sure enough. Just under a little bleak hill there was a collection of queer looking huts.

Several squatty looking human beings were lounging about the place. There were troops of dogs and a peculiar kind of reindeer.

"Esquimaux!" exclaimed Frank.

It was indeed a camp of these, the nomads of the frozen North.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESQUIMAUX.

ESQUIMAUX they were beyond a doubt, but the question was, what were they doing in these latitudes?

Generally they were found within the ice belt.

This locality was far south of it.

"Esquimaux," repeated Walter. "What has brought them down here, Frank?"

"That is inexplicable," agreed the young inventor. "Certainly it is an unusual thing."

"Shall we hail them?"

Frank hesitated a moment.

Then his curiosity mastered him.

"I am going to know what they are doing so far south at this time of year," he declared.

"Good!" cried Walter. "I approve of that."

The air-ship therefore began to descend. Down it went until it hung right over the village.

The Esquimaux were thrown into a state of the most intense excitement.

Naturally the appearance of the air-ship over their village was a strange thing to them.

They had no means of knowing what sort of a curious manifestation it was.

The average Esquimaux is not superstitious, but the air-ship was to them something more than a natural phenomenon.

Of course terror seized them.

It did not occur to them that the beings on board the air-ship were human, or that they were friends.

But if the Esquimaux is not deep of intellect, he is nevertheless not a coward; and therefore preparations were made by the strange nomads to defend the village against the invaders.

But Frank did not wish to trade upon their fears.

He desired, if possible, to make friends with them; so he went to the rail with a white flag.

But of this symbol of truth the world over the nomads knew nothing. They, instead, seemed to regard it as a manifestation of hostility.

They sent a flight of javelins up into the air. These rattled against the metal hull, however, without doing any damage.

One of them, however, nearly struck Pomp. It was a warning to use the most extreme care.

Frank would not allow the fire returned. They should not be natural enemies he argued.

Down settled the Rainbow.

It rested upon the ground just on the verge of the Esquimaux' settlement. One of the curious skin tents was not more than twenty yards distant.

The Esquimaux warriors were massed in a body just beyond. They were ready for a hostile demonstration.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Walter, "it don't look as if they were inclined to make friends!"

"They do not know what to make of us," said Frank, "but I think we can gain their friendship yet!"

He knew that it would be necessary to take some chances. He did not hesitate to do this.

Stepping out in plain view on the deck, he held up the palms of his hands. It was a critical moment.

A hundred javelins covered him. The Nomads knew how to throw them with deadly effect.

They could have terminated Frank's career then and there. But by good fortune they did not.

The signal became comprehensive to them.

At once their manner changed.

They lowered their javelins. Then one of their men came forward. He was unarmed and held the palms of his hands outward.

Frank made an answering signal. When within a few yards of the air-ship, the fellow spoke.

But Frank was utterly unable to understand his lingo. The Esquimaux tongue is by no means easy of interpretation.

"What does he say?" asked Walter.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Frank; "it sounds like no language I ever heard before."

"He probably thinks the same of our English."

"Yes, no doubt."

"How will you be able to converse with him then?"

"There is another way!" replied Frank, unconcernedly.

He descended from the air-ship's deck and advanced to meet the Esquimaux.

He made a number of signs which the nomad for a time could not understand. But both persisted for some while until they made themselves fairly understood.

But this did not suit Frank.

He was wholly unable to arrive at any conclusion from the fellow's talk of the purpose of the Esquimaux in coming so far south.

All efforts to arrive at this were in vain.

The Esquimaux looked puzzled, shook his head, and was dumb.

Frank was about to give the effort up when another of the band advanced.

He was taller and not so round of form and features as the other. He advanced confidently, and to the amazement of the Americans spoke in excellent English:

"Howdy friends! How the deuce did you drop down here?"

Frank looked at the speaker in sheer amazement.

"You—you are no Esquimaux!" he exclaimed.

"Only by adoption, that's all. I'm as good a Yankee at heart as any of you."

"In that case," cried Frank, "what are you doing here?"

"Living a virtuous life. That I didn't always do when I was in civilization."

"Do you mean to say that you, an American, have voluntarily adopted a life with these people?"

The other nodded his head.

"That's the size of it."

"But—who are you?"

"I am Jack Dunham, and I was first mate of the whaler Venture. Ten years ago we were cast away in Baffin's Bay. I was the only man to get ashore, and these Esquimaux befriended me. I have remained with them ever since."

The aerial voyagers listened with amazement to this story.

"And do you like it?" asked Walter.

"Like it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you bet I wouldn't go back to civilization if I could."

"That is queer."

"Is it? Well, I'll tell you. When I was in the U. S., I was only a drunken sailor. Now I'm married to a snug little woman, and have five children to make me happy."

"Our life is wild and free. We live on the fat of the land, such as it is, and always have plenty. You don't know the feeling of freedom we have!"

"I can imagine," said Walter, shrugging his shoulders.

"But you wouldn't change with me?"

"I think not."

"Nor I with you! Both satisfied, eh? Well, that's right! We can't quarrel on the strength of that!"

"One question," said Frank.

"Well?"

"What are your people doing so far from the ice and snow? I never knew them to come so far south."

"All my fault," replied Dunham. "I get stale in the eternal snow and ice, and have to have a change. As I am one of the chiefs, of course I can order it."

"Very good."

"But I'd like to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"What kind of a ship is that, that travels in the air?"

"An air-ship."

"Yes, to be sure. But what makes it sail in the air? Is it full of gas?"

"Not a bit of it."

Then Frank invited Dunham and the Esquimaux chief aboard. He showed them the mechanism of the air-ship to their wonderment.

"Well, I'll be keel hauled!" exclaimed the sailor. "I never saw anything like it before! So you're going to the North Pole?"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Well, you'll have a circus to get there. You'll see the coldest weather you ever did."

"Ah, indeed!"

"And then you'll have to cross the open Polar Sea."

"Ah, then there is such a sea?"

"Certainly! It freezes over about once in forty or fifty years. The chief's father went across it on sledges."

"Indeed! What is beyond it?"

Jack Dunham shrugged his shoulders.

"They tell a queer story," he said, "they talk of another world where there is no ice and where the people are a queer lot. I don't know whether it's a fairy story or not."

"Then that is an Esquimaux tradition?"

"Yes! You'll find out for yourselves, though. But if you're looking for the end of the earth, don't fret! You'll find it there!"

Frank was interested.

"How far do you reckon it across the Polar Sea?" he asked.

"As near as I can make it from their figures, full five hundred miles more or less!"

"Quite a stretch of water."

"Yes!"

"Well, Mr. Dunham!" said Frank, cheerily, "we are glad to have met you and your people. We hope you will continue to live in Esquimaux land, and we wish you a happy life."

"The same to you and glad to meet some of my countrymen!" replied Dunham.

"Then you have no desire to return to civilization?"

"Not the least, thanks to you. I shall live and die here!"

"One question more. Is the Polar Sea frozen over at present?"

"I believe it is!" replied Dunham, "for at least the first hundred miles. Oh, you will see plenty of ice!"

"No doubt!"

"Good-bye to you!"

"Good-bye!"

The voyagers waved farewell. The air-ship again sprang into space. Once more the northward course was set.

The colloquy with Dunham had opened an interesting subject for Frank and Walter to discuss.

"Do you know what I think?" ventured the young reporter.

"Well?" asked Frank.

"I think those Esquimaux are right. There is a Polar continent."

"Or island!"

"I will modify my words and say land. I also think I can account for the existence of a patch of warm climate in the heart of the frigid."

"How?"

"The North Pole or the Polar Land, is the top or end of the earth, call it how you will. There is no reason why there should not be volcanoes there. That easily accounts for the climate!"

"Then you believe that the volcanic region, with its internal heat, regulates the climate in that limited area?"

"That is just what I mean."

CHAPTER IX.

A PRACTICAL JOKE.

FRANK was not prepared to dispute the young reporter. For aught he knew, he was right.

It was certainly a logical explanation of a peculiar anomaly.

It was certainly wonderful that a region described by the Esquimaux as of temperate climate should exist in the very heart of the world of ice and snow.

"I do not believe that the volcanic influence is confined to the Polar Land," declared Walter.

"Indeed!"

"I believe that it extends under the sea, and has its influence upon its waters. Why should it not?"

"It looks logical," agreed Frank. "At any rate it is the best explanation at hand. I think we can risk the assumption easily enough."

Walter was full of his idea.

As the air-ship sped away northward, he was constantly on deck looking for the appearance of the open Polar Sea.

One day Frank announced that they were over the frozen Arctic. But in its glaciers, crevasses and huge fields of snow it differed little from the mainland.

The voyagers were now compelled to dress a little different.

They wore thick suits of fur, and protected their eyes with colored glasses. Despite the gloom of the Arctic night the glare of the snow was painful.

Many strange sights were witnessed from the deck of the air-ship.

White bears and other Arctic animals were seen in great abundance.

In fact many a shot was risked at them despite the distance. And they were not always without effect.

But Frank was too intent on his course to pause and pick up any game shot by the way.

He with Walter was anxiously looking for the phenomenon of the open sea and later of the Polar Land.

Three days passed.

The air-ship still held its northward course. But yet the same fields of ice intervened.

But on the morning of the fourth day a revelation came.

Those first on deck beheld the distant mirror-like gleam of the open sea. It extended along the horizon line like a bar of silver.

"Hurrah!" cried Walter. "Our efforts are rewarded."

"It is the open Polar Sea," said Frank, with a thrill.

"Bogorra, it's in luck we are," averred Barney in delight.

Nearer the air-ship drew to the mighty expanse. It rolled in a tideless flood upon the verge of the ice field.

And almost immediately upon passing over its surface, a change in temperature was noted.

The air was perceptibly warmer and already the heavy furs felt quite uncomfortable.

In fact it shortly became necessary to in a great measure dispense with them. The air-ship soon left the ice fields behind.

They became but a mere white line on the horizon. But it was yet quite a sail to the Polar Land.

A matter yet of four hundred miles. This was not a slight distance to cover.

But Frank reckoned on covering it in less than two days. Then for the first time white men would behold the wonderful land of the North Pole.

They would truly have reached the end of the earth.

It could be counted upon as the most wonderful achievement known to the civilized world. No wonder the voyagers felt deeply elated.

On sailed the air-ship.

The first day's sail over the Polar Sea was unbroken by an exciting incident.

But the second day Jedediah with Barney and Pomp became mixed up in a little frolic aboard the ship, which came near having a serious ending.

Barney had made up his mind to get square with Pomp for past offenses.

This was not easy.

The ducky was right onto him and his game. He managed to frustrate it every time.

But Barney's was a shrewd head.

An idea occurred to him.

He thought of Jedediah.

"Begorra!" he thought, "I'll git the Yankee to help me. Shure he'll do it."

It was but a moment's work for him to enlist the sympathies of Spruce. Now if there was one weakness Jed had, it was for practical joking.

That is to say, he liked to play the joke on somebody else, but as is generally the case did not enjoy a joke played on him.

He entered at once into Barney's scheme with a relish.

This was the game.

During Pomp's watch that night they would rig up as disciples of Mephistopheles. Barney had the necessary cosmetics, and the rest could be devised.

The plan was to pounce upon Pomp, put a rope around his waist, blindfold him and hang him over the rail. The darky's superstitious weakness was the main lever to be used.

The two jokers matured their plans in an elaborate manner.

Poor Pomp was all unsuspecting the treatment in store for him. At least so the jokers believed.

But unfortunately for them another and disinterested party overheard their whole scheme.

This was Walter May.

Inadvertently he had been taking a nap under an awning on the main deck. Barney and Jed were not ten feet away behind the skylight, when the trick was planned, and Walter heard all.

Of course he enjoyed it.

He was something of a practical joker himself. At least he was as fond of fun as any one.

"Well, well," he muttered. "What a streak of luck. Here is a chance for me to have some fun on my own account!"

He was not altogether a sympathizer with Pomp, nor was he disposed to champion his cause.

But here was an unrivaled opportunity to joke the jokers. He at once laid his wires.

When night came Barney went on watch as usual. At two o'clock Pomp came up to relieve him.

Then the Celt scurried below. In the Yankee's stateroom he found Jedediah with all the paraphernalia.

"Begorra, the naygur suspects nothing," he cried. "Shure we'll paralyze him."

"Yew kin bet yure boots we will," grunted Jedediah. "He'll think he's sent fer b'goshi!"

The two jokers proceeded to rig themselves up. But they were not the only ones engaged in this sort of work.

They donned some black tights and painted their faces a brilliant vermilion with black shading around the eyes.

Then they donned skull caps to which Barney had ingeniously fitted some horns. The Celt understood the use of chemicals and had a phosphorus preparation which could be applied at intervals of a half hour or so, making their faces luminous in the dark.

With great glee and gusto they prepared what they believed would be to Pomp the greatest surprise party of his life.

Indeed they were unable to recognize each other, so adroit was the disguise. Success seemed bound to wait upon them.

Barney was particularly elated.

"Bejabers, av I don't settle matthers with the naygur this tolme," he muttered.

"Yew don't s'pose we'll skeer him tew death, dew yew?" asked Jedediah, with some hesitation.

"Whurrool there's no danger av that!"

"I reckermember of Sam Pilkins, who was Uncle Silas Holden's adopted nephew, bein' skeered so that he didn't ever git his full growth," ventured the conscientious Jedediah. "Naow I hain't nuthin' special as I know on agin ther nigger, an'—"

"Begorra, if yez are afraid, why didn't yez say so?" exploded Barney.

"I hain't afeerd," retorted Spruce. "I wuz only thinkin' of how mighty afeerd ther nigger wud be."

"Bejabers, an' isn't that phwat we are up to?" cried Barney. "Yez can bet I'll skeer him out av his sinses if I can."

Jedediah said no more.

They were both quite ready now, and glided out of the stateroom. Their plan was to go boldly on deck and confront Pomp.

The darky would be expected to have a fit of terror. Then they would pounce upon him, and suspend him at the end of the anchor cable.

Barney would then steer the ship for the rest of the night and pretend to rescue the darky in the morning.

It was a daring and well laid plan.

But like many another, it was destined to go askew. How this happened we shall see.

Silently the two fiends glided out of the state-room. They crossed the cabin and reached the stairs.

Then they halted.

For a moment the hair of each stood on end. Could they really believe their senses, or were they dreaming?

What apparition stood before them? Were they looking in a mirror? It is safe to say that neither was ever so terrified before.

"Great Jehu!" gasped Jedediah, "it's the old Nick himself!"

"Howly murder!" wailed Barney. "Phwat's to become av us?"

For there before them, seated on the stairs, was Mephistopheles himself, whom they were impersonating.

Had he taken offense at their caricature of his personality and ap-

peared to them in protest? This awful thought flashed across their terrified minds.

The face of the true Mephistopheles was wreathed in sardonic smiles. He did not speak, but made flaunting gestures. And there he sat in their path.

It was enough for the two jokers. Their plans were exploded.

With a yell of insane terror they bolted for their state-room. Once they saw the devil pursuing them.

They burst into the room and instantly divested themselves of their Satanic raiment.

This accomplished they ventured to peer out of the door. Mephistopheles had disappeared.

Tremblingly they exchanged opinions.

"Begorra, I'll niver fool wid the devil's make-up again," averred Barney. "Shure, I niver had sich a fright in me lolve. It's a wonder he didn't blast us on the spot. Did yez see how he had his eye on ye, Misther Spruce?"

CHAPTER X.

THE POLAR LAND.

"By jimcracks!" rejoined Jedediah, "I wuz sure he'd have yew one spell. It's ther fust time I ever seen ther devil. I reckon, Jedediah, yew had better gin up chewin' terbacker an' playin' of jokes!"

"Bejabers, av I'd only some holy wather wid me I'd med him git off them stairs," avowed Barney.

It was noticeable that the two men were uncommonly sober the next day.

They went about their duties in a somewhat fearful way, as if they half expected to meet his Satanic majesty again.

They did meet him in person a number of times, but were unaware of the fact.

Walter May watched them with convulsed and suppressed merriment. He was delighted with the success of his little joke.

"They won't try that game again right away," he reflected.

Pomp, the intended victim, was all unsuspecting the truth.

But later in the day Walter thought he would complete the joke. So he procured some charcoal, and making a soot of it, mixed with some sulphur, he sketched the imprint of a cloven hoof on the cabin stairs.

Then at lunch time, when all were at the table, he casually remarked:

"Did any one notice a smell of brimstone around the ship this morning? I should think his Satanic majesty himself had been paying us a visit."

Frank looked up in idle interest. Pomp was unconcerned, but Barney and Jedediah turned deadly pale.

"I think you must have indulged in too strong a night cap, May!" said Frank, with a laugh.

"Well, either I am right—or my vision has gone wrong!" declared Walter.

"What? You have not seen His Majesty of the Cloven Hoof?"

"No, but I have seen his footprint."

Barney and Jedediah trembled and looked aghast. Frank looked up in surprise.

"Now I believe you have been drinking, Walter," he said. "Wherever did you see such a thing?"

"On the cabin stairs," declared the young reporter, "but for fear I did not see aright I wish somebody else would go and look. Will not you go, Barney?"

The Celt turned deadly pale and stammered in reply:

"Shure, sor—I'd rather not, av it's the same to you."

"Then Mr. Spruce will go."

"Not by a durned sight!" exploded the Yankee. "I ain't fond of havin' anything tew dew with the devil or any of his durned imps!"

Walter affected surprise.

"Why, that's queer!" he declared. "I don't see anything to be afraid of. It's hardly likely that the devil has been aboard this ship."

"Look here, May," said Frank, "are you joking or not?"

"I am in earnest," replied Walter.

"You say this footprint is on the cabin stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pomp," said Frank, "go and see if it is there now."

"A'right, sah."

Barney and Jedediah drew a breath of relief. They were spared what to them was a horror.

In a few moments Pomp returned with chattering teeth. His eyes stuck out like beads.

"Well, you simpering rascal," cried Frank, "was the footprint there?"

"Yes, sah," cried the darky, excitedly. "It am jes' de footprint ob de debbil, too!"

Frank looked amazed.

He glanced at Walter, who was as matter-of-fact as you please.

"Well," muttered the young inventor, "let us see about this."

He went to the cabin stairs. The others followed. Sure enough, there was the imprint of the cloven hoof.

Frank brushed it off the step, and then looked from one to the other of the group.

"What sort of a monkey trick is this, anyway?" he cried, angrily. "Who put that footprint there?"

Barney had held in as long as he could. Certain that the ship had really been visited by Mephistopheles, he cried:

"Shure, sor, it was Ould Nick himself, an' me an' his nibbs, Misther Spruce here, were afther seein' him, sor!"

Frank looked from one to the other of the jokers in a penetrating way.

"Look here, Barney!" he cried, "out with it. What sort of hocus-pocus is this, anyway?"

The Celt thus adjured made a clean breast of all.

He told of the plan concocted by Jedediah and himself. Of how they had impersonated Mephistopheles and must thereby have so aroused the ire of that dignitary that he had appeared to them on the stairs.

Pomp's eyes dilated, but he could not help a chuckle and said just loud enough for Barney to hear:

"Sarve yo' jes' right fo' tryin' sich a game on me!"

Frank for a moment was puzzled but a wink from Walter gave him the cue. So he said severely:

"Barney and Jed, this is a warning to you to refrain from practical jokes in the future. You are sure to get the worst of it. Heed the warning."

Barney and Spruce did heed it. They slunk away much abashed.

Pomp felt triumphant.

In the cabin later Walter told Frank of the whole affair. Both laughed till their sides ached.

It was safe to say that practical jokes played no further part in that voyage.

Even while they were laughing in the cabin a hail came from the deck. It was Barney's voice:

"Arrah, Misther Frank! It's land in sight."

"Land!" exclaimed Walter.

"The Polar Land," said Frank.

Both were on deck in a twinkling. A glance was enough. Land was truly in sight to the northward.

The Polar Sea rolled peacefully beneath. The gloom of the Arctic night prevented their distinguishing objects on the distant shore.

But they knew well enough that the long black line was land.

The air-ship drew momentarily nearer. Frank now used the search light. This showed up the distant coast very plainly.

It was seen to be rock bound and rather black-looking. But what was beyond might be more inviting.

Nearer the air-ship drew until the land was now beneath them. Then the air-ship began to pass inland.

The sea was left behind.

They were now directly over the Polar continent. A great change began to unfold itself.

The bleak region of the coast gave way to fertile valleys, picturesque forests and hills.

Suddenly Walter cried:

"A human habitation!"

This was true.

Upon a spur of a mountain wall was a structure of wood and stone. It was somewhat after the architecture of a medieval castle.

In the great courtyard there was a troop of men.

They were roughly clad in the skins of wild beasts, and armed with spears and rough shields. They were giants in form, with great masses of yellow hair.

The aerial voyagers gazed at them with astonishment. But if their surprise was great, the amazement of the Polar natives was greater.

The search-light was turned full upon the courtyard, and all was made as plain as day.

There was no reason why the Polar people should not be amazed or even terrified, at this sudden manifestation in the air over their heads.

They for a time remained apparently spell-bound. Then they were seen to break for cover.

In a few moments not one of them was to be seen in the courtyard. They had sought refuge.

Frank allowed the air-ship to descend until it was not more than fifty feet above the courtyard.

Then he went out on deck with Walter. It came near proving a fatal move for them.

A shower of arrows came from a window in the stone structure.

One of these passed through Frank's sleeve. Another narrowly missed penetrating Walter's skull.

"Hello!" exclaimed the young reporter; "they have got us marked, Frank."

"So it seems!" cried the young inventor. "We had better get out of the way!"

So they both retreated to the pilot-house. Whereat a voice in some strange tongue came from the castle. It was couched in accents of inquiry.

Frank could not understand the lingo, but he replied:

"If you know the English language we can talk with you."

But no intelligible reply was made. Then Frank tried German, French and Norwegian. The latter seemed to make the best impression.

After a few attempts at a parley in this tongue, Frank declared:

"On my word, they speak a corruption of the old Norse tongue. I think that we can soon make each other understand."

"The Norse tongue," exclaimed Walter, "then that explains their presence here. You know the old Scandinavian warriors were great Arctic explorers?"

"Yes!"

"And there has always been a Norse superstition that some of their ancestors have a home far up in the vicinity of the North Pole!"

"That is on record!"

"And are we not the lucky ones to prove it a fact?"

"It would seem so!"

The explorers were now in a state of much excitement. The Polar people seemed somewhat reassured and more inclined to be friendly.

They evidently had been prone to regard the air-ship and its people as visitors from a lunar world and natural enemies.

Assured that this was not the case they changed their tactics.

The result was that Frank was soon in conversation with the chief who was a powerful built man with muscles like a Hercules and great masses of golden yellow hair.

It was some while before they could pass a comprehensive word. But the dialect employed by the Polar chief was so similar to the ancient Norse tongue that they finally succeeded in establishing a lingo comprehensive to both.

This was a victory for Frank, and after this had been established he was able to gather all the facts concerning the Polar land and its people.

The result was that a basis of friendship was at once established.

CHAPTER XI.

WALTER'S ROMANCE.

JALMAR, which was the name the Norse chieftain gave, listened to Frank's broken explanation of their appearance in this region.

The Norseman was unable to understand how the air-ship was able to travel in the air.

The Polar people had galleys of their own with which they navigated the contiguous seas.

But they were unable to understand the principle of aerial flight.

Frank explained it as best he could.

Then the subject was dropped.

Jalmar proved very quickly that he was a friend and a cheery host.

The air-ship rested in the courtyard. The Norsemen gathered around with many friendly overtures.

By Jalmar's orders a feast was inaugurated. A freshly slaughtered bear was brought in and roasted upon a mighty spit.

Then wine of a very good quality was brought out.

It ran like water for a time.

To the surprise of the Americans, Jalmar gave the information that the whole Polar continent was covered with the vines of the wine bearing grape.

These he explained had been brought from Norway by their ancestors many hundreds of years previously.

Frank could not help but ask Jalmar why they did not make an effort to get away from the Polar Continent and back to Norway.

In response Jalmar waved his hand to the northward and said in substance:

"Why should we leave this fair land? Here is promise and plenty. Here lie the bones of our fathers who adopted this land. It is our home. Why do we care for any other?"

There was logic in Jalmar's reply.

To be sure he explained, all at present was dark and gloomy. But in a few months the northern sun would appear above the horizon, and then all would be light and warm.

He described the interior of the Polar land as a wonderfully beautiful region. Frank listened with interest.

And the more deeply implanted was the resolve to see this wonderful land which was truly at the end of the Earth.

Another startling fact Frank learned of Jalmar.

There were two bands of the Norsemen on the continent.

One of them lived on the far side and they were continually at war. They were led by a very savage chieftain named Harold.

Whenever the two tribes met there was a bloody battle.

It had been years since the last encounter and then Harold the Fury as he was called had been defeated.

Tradition had it that the revengeful Harold had planned a great expedition against Jalmar and that he intended if possible to kill him and wipe his people out of existence.

This had caused no little apprehension among Jalmar's people.

They had therefore built this strong castle upon the heights. In the fiord near were their war galleys.

So that in a measure they were in a measure prepared for the war-like Harold. All this was told to Frank.

At once the young inventor's sympathies were aroused, especially as Jalmar's was the weaker band.

"You and Harold are brothers," he said, "you should not fight."

Jalmar shook his head.

"Yo do not know the Norse people."

"Is that their way?"

"It is their way. Son against son—father against brother. The first warfare is in the family. Our race was born to war, to pillage and fight. It is in the blood, and it must ever be so!"

Frank remembered the old tales of Eric the Red and other Norse heroes and the Vikings and was not disposed to dispute the old chieftain.

"But it is not right," he said conclusively.

And the more he pondered upon the matter the more decided he was he was to witness the first encounter between Jalmar and Harold.

Also he was inclined to see fair play, if such was in his power.

He intimated this to Walter. But the young reporter was not so inclined to regard the matter with favor.

"I think I would let them fight their own battles," he declared. "Give them the chance!"

"Perhaps you are right," said Frank. "We will consider the matter."

But a later incident changed Walter's mind. He was then ready to fight the battles of the Norsemen single-handed if need be.

Jalmar had a daughter.

This explains all.

She was marvelously beautiful. In fact of that pure type of which the poets rave.

Her face was white and regular in contour, her form petite, her eyes a soft blue, and her hair of delicious golden hue.

Bernhilda was her name, and at first glance Walter thought her the most beautiful of all earthly creatures.

He had never seen her equal.

He communicated this fact to Frank. The young inventor laughed.

"It is not possible that you, practical man of the world, have come up into this wild Polar country to fall in love with a native maid," he said.

"I'm afraid that's the truth," said Walter lugubriously.

"But—you are not in earnest?"

"Yes, I am."

Frank was now astonished.

"You are crazy, man. The girl can never shine in society. She is not educated."

"But she is young," protested Walter, "and she is no ordinary person. She has rare gifts. In a few years she will be the peer of any woman on the American continent."

To say that Frank was surprised would be a mild statement. He was also much alarmed.

"Whew!" he muttered. "I wonder if May really means what he says!"

It soon became evident that he did. He was not a fellow to mince matters.

Bernhilda gave him her heart almost at first sight. They were instantly the deepest of lovers.

Before a week had passed the ardent young reporter had laid the case before old Jalmar.

The Norse chieftain was mightily honored and pleased. His consent was at once secured.

Matters had gone thus far when Frank attempted to reason with Walter.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, May."

"I am not."

"Yes you are. How are you going to marry this half savage woman?"

Pardon me! You are speaking of my future wife."

Frank was nettled.

"There is nobody present who can marry you according to our laws. Give up this foolishness, May?"

"I do not intend to be married for years yet," replied Walter. "My plan is to take Bernhilda home to my aunt, who is prominent in society. The girl shall be educated and trained—"

"By that time she will see another perhaps—"

"Then I shall not restrain her. If her heart remains mine we will then be married."

Frank saw the force of the young reporter's argument. Yet he could not believe that it was for the best.

"Is her father willing to part with her?" he asked.

"I have his blessing."

"Again, do you think she realizes what it will mean to go forever away from her people?"

"I don't think she will ever want to return."

Frank gave up the argument.

"I see that is of no use to talk with you," he said. "You are set upon this one purpose."

So the matter dropped.

At least for the time.

But Walter learned a fact which made his blood boil. Jalmar informed him that Harold the Fury, had set his heart upon capturing the young Norse princess, and making her his wife.

He had a number of times sent envoys with offers for her hand, but Jalmar had indignantly rejected all these.

"I would rather see my Bernhilda dead than in the care of my foe!" he said, strongly.

And Walter muttered sotto voce:

"He shall never have her!"

So it can be understood why, when Frank proposed a trip into the interior, that Walter opposed it.

"Let us not go yet!" he entreated.

"Why?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"Well, I will tell you. I think we shall be needed here."

"Needed here?"

"Yes."

"And why, pray?"

"For the reason that Harold, the Fury, is on his way here now with his savage band to attack the castle."

Frank smiled.

"You are more interested than at first," he said, roguishly.

"Yes. I will admit it," replied Walter. "You know the reason why."

"Well," said Frank, "I admire your candor if not your good sense. But it seems to me very foolish work! I am anxious to explore this Polar land—"

"And you shall do so!" said Walter.

"Ah! then you agree?"

"Certainly! I will wait here until you come back!"

Frank whistled shrilly.

"And lose your chance to see the wonders of the Polar land?" he asked.

"Even so!"

"I am surprised!"

No amount of argument was of any avail. Walter had made up his mind, so Frank decided to let him have his own way.

Walter was given a rude chamber in the castle. He retained a couple of rifles and some ammunition.

"I shall make it warm for Harold, the Fury!" he declared. "I don't believe he will care to renew the attack."

"Be careful he don't make it warm for you!" said Frank, with a smile. He liked to tease his friend.

It was his inner purpose to return and be present at the visit of Harold. But he would not impart this to Walter.

So the air-ship took its leave.

Due northward it sailed from Jalmar's castle. In a short while it was speeding over the wonderful Arctic Land.

And a wonderful region it was.

Jalmar had not exaggerated its wonders in the least. It was past all powers of description.

For hours the Rainbow sailed on over a mighty panorama of natural beauty and wildness of scene.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

"BEGORRA!" commented Barney, "I'm afther thinkin' that young love cracked chap will wish himself aboard the air-ship afore a day is past. Shure, I cudn't see anything about the wimmen to fascinate me. Phwat do yez say, Yankee?"

"Gosh durned ef I don't agree with ye!" cried Jed, forcibly. "Naow thar wuz Sal Hawkins up in Sprattville as wuz ther pootiest gal I ever seen. She could saw a cord of wood in ten hours, milk a dozen cows at a milkin', an' dance ther Susianna with ther deacon's son. Ther's ther kind of a female fer me, yew bet!"

"Huh!" muttered Pomp; "dar am too much yaller ha'r fer me. Jes' gib me one ob our Lowsianny gals—reg'lar yaller gals! Dey am de stuff fer me!"

But Frank was really sorry that Walter had decided to stay at the castle.

The young reporter was excellent company, and Frank missed him greatly.

The young inventor was inclined to look favorably upon Bernhilda, the flaxen-haired daughter of the Norse chieftain Jalmar. He knew that it was not an impossible thing for Walter to carry out his plan of educating her.

But still he could not reconcile himself to the idea altogether. However, he was not disposed to see the young lover get into trouble.

When Harold, the Fury, should make his descent upon Jalmar's people he was determined to be there with his air-ship.

The Rainbow kept a steady course to the northward.

There were times when the Aurora Borealis made all as light as day and the scene was enjoyable.

There were plenty of wild beasts and game on the Polar Continent. Barney was anxious to descend and hunt them. But Frank would not hear to this.

For two days the air-ship sailed on and then they came in sight of the sea again.

They had crossed the Polar Continent and were now upon its opposite shore.

"This is truly the end of the earth," thought Frank, as he gazed over the sea. "In that direction lies Asia. This Polar Continent is the very apex of the globe."

The young inventor was satisfied. He had accomplished his grand purpose of a visit to the end of the earth.

It was now in order to return home and tell of it. This he was resolved to do at once.

He imparted the resolution to his three companions.

"Golly! I've done glad fo' to git back to Readestown," cried Pomp, as he stood on his head for a change.

"Begorra, ther's no place loike home sweet home!" cried Barney, turning a handspring.

"I'm reddy tew git back tew Skittletown any time!" declared Jedediah, whittling away industriously, "b'gosh, I'll tell all ther boys in ther store about it, an' when Sal Hawkins hears what a traveler I've bin mebbe she'll jilt thet Hi Bilkins fer me. Gosh t' blazes!"

Therefore Frank felt no compunctions in turning about and heading for home.

But Jedediah ventured:

"Haow about thet young reporter, Mister Reade? If we go off an' leave him he might sass us in the papers an' write up some bad articles about us."

"Oh, I would never think of going off and leaving him behind," said Frank, "set your mind easy about that. We will stop at Jalmar's castle."

"What dew yew think about that gal?" asked Jedediah keenly.

"Oh, I think well of her."

"Then yew ain't goin' tew object tew takin' her along with us?"

"Oh, no!"

Jedediah showed his intense satisfaction. The truth was his sympathies were all with Walter.

The air-ship skirted the coast a ways, then set out at full speed on the return.

The Polar continent with its Stygian valleys and slumbering volcanoes was quickly passed over.

Thirty hours later Barney in the pilot house sighted the castle of Jalmar. But as he did so he gave a great cry of alarm.

"Shure, Mither Frank!" he cried.

"Well?" replied Frank.

"There's foightin' going on down there. There's the devil to pay?" It required but a glance for Frank to see that Barney was right.

Lively scenes were being enacted below.

Jalmar's castle was in a state of siege. The minions of Harold the Fury were thronged about it.

It was an exciting scene, and reminded one of historical accounts of old time warfare.

The attacking party were vainly trying to carry the causeway which led into the castle.

Jalmar's men were working a bold resistance.

The crack of a rifle could be heard, it was known that Walter was doing his part.

"Heigho!" exclaimed Frank, as he surveyed the situation, "it looks lively down there. Bring out the rifles, Barney and Pomp!"

No second bidding was needed.

The three servitors were ripe for a ruction, and in a few moments were all in readiness.

Frank allowed the air-ship to sail down within rifle range.

Jalmar's people were encouraged and cheered wildly.

Harold's men were astounded at the spectacle of the air-ship hanging over them, and did not know what to make of it.

It was only by the exhortations of bold Harold himself that they held to their line of battle. Their superstitious fears were evidently thoroughly aroused.

As the air-ship came down, Walter and Jalmar appeared on one of battlements.

The young reporter shouted:

"Hello up there!"

"Hello!" shouted Frank.

"You have come just in the nick of time! These fellows are savage fighters, I can tell you!"

"It looks like it," replied Frank. "They have got you nearly whipped now!"

"We want your help!"

"All right. Shall we open fire on them?"

"Yes, and we will make a sortie. We ought to drive them."

"Most surely!"

Frank picked up a rifle.

"Come, boys," he said. "Give it to the rascals!"

No second bidding was needed. Fire was opened at once.

The effect was at once apparent. Harold's men began to drop like leaves in autumn.

They brandished their weapons and yelled defiance to their aerial foes. But this did not help them any.

"Give it to them!" cried Frank; "they are losing ground!"

And now the big gates swung open and Jalmar's men came forth. This changed the outlook at once.

They were wild for the fray, glad for the opportunity to disconcert their foes. And success was theirs.

Harold, the Fury fought madly. In the press he suddenly found himself face to face with Jalmar.

These two men were sworn foes. The opportunity of their lives had come. They at once embraced it.

Wild beasts never fought more savagely.

For a while it was doubtful which would be the victor. Nobody ventured to interfere.

Then suddenly Jalmar's battle club crossed that of Harold. The latter's wrist was broken. Jalmar held his old foe's life in his hand.

The father of Bernhilda, however, was too noble a man to strike a fallen foe. He hurled his club aside and folded his arms.

"Is Harold, the Fury, satisfied?" he asked, with dignity.

Hate, rage and baffled fury blended in the Norse chieftain's eyes. For a moment he trembled with suppressed rage.

Then he saw the noble bearing of the man who had vanquished him. His own honor was touched.

He bowed his head.

"Harold submits," he said. "He is the prisoner at the mercy of Jalmar!"

No effort was made to bind the conquered chief. His word was considered a sufficient bond. His followers all laid down their arms.

Then the air-ship descended, and a conference was held.

The result was thoroughly satisfactory to all. The feud of centuries between the two Norse factions was ended.

The hatchet was buried. Jalmar and Harold embraced as brothers should. Harold cast sheepish eyes at Bernhilda, but relinquished his hopes when he learned that she was already betrothed.

Then weapons were laid aside and a great carnival was held in Jalmar's castle.

The wedding ceremony between Bernhilda and Walter May according to the Norse custom was celebrated.

Barney and Pomp went beyond their depth in Norse wine and Jedediah kept his end up.

"Whew! Gosh t' blazes!" cried the Yankee. "Never had sich a

gol durned good time in my life! I'll jist tell everybody in Skittle-town all about it when I git home."

Thus for two days revelry held at Jalmar's Castle.

Then Frank announced the start for home. At this there was some dismay.

Bernhilda took her last farewell of her kindred.

Henceforth she was to be of another world, of another people. Her star was to shine in a different constellation.

She was embraced by her mother and father. A farewell was taken of all. Then the voyagers went aboard the air-ship.

The Rainbow leaped into the air. Then she sailed away to the southward.

While the Polar people sat upon the cliffs and watched her until she was but a mere speck in the sky.

One of their fairest daughters was aboard her and bound for a foreign clime—a clime of wonders and strange life.

That which their descendants may some time visit when the Polar Continent shall be given free intercourse with the land of civilization. But which they will probably never see.

And Bernhilda stood on the air-ship's deck and watched the land of her nativity fade from view.

She had left that home behind forever. Those dear ones she might never see again.

She had pledged her heart to a new life—to a new love. For a time tears welled in her eyes.

Then she turned to Walter's arms, which were her haven thenceforth.

The others watched her not without emotion.

It was no light sacrifice Bernhilda was making.

And Frank Reade, Jr., said almost menacingly to the young reporter:

"May, you have put your foot in it. Now if you was my own brother and I was to learn that you had betrayed this holy trust, I would kill you for it."

"I understand you!" said Walter, rigidly, "but I am capable of preserving that trust until the end of my life!"

"That is assurance enough!" declared Frank.

And the air-ship still held its southward course.

And this, dear reader, brings us almost to the end of our tale.

Of course the voyage home was a propitious one. One day people in Readestown were startled with a thrilling announcement.

"The air-ship!"

"She has returned!"

This thrilling report ran like wildfire through the town.

People crowded from shops and houses to see that this was true. High in the zenith hung the wonderful air-ship.

She was settling rapidly down.

On her deck the aerial voyagers were in a state of joyful excitement. Not one but was glad to get home.

It is all right enough to plan a trip of adventure or pleasure. But the getting home is always the pleasantest thing of all.

Everybody on board agreed to this,

Down settled the air-ship.

Jedediah was strutting about the deck as proud as a peacock.

"I'm goin' tew take the fust train back to Skittletown," he declared. "All ther neighbors will want tew hear about this, an' yew bet I kin tell 'em a straight story tew."

"Tell them about the visit of His Satanic Majesty," said Walter, slyly.

And Jedediah shivered, while Frank laughed immoderately. Down settled the air-ship.

All the prominent people of Readestown were on hand to greet the returned adventurers.

It need hardly be said that the welcome was a warm one. A regular fete was held.

Then Frank made an address to the crowd telling them of the wonderful sights and adventures.

"But you will get a far better idea," he said, "by reading the account given by Mr. May here, reporter for the New Times. You can all read that."

"As soon as possible I shall publish a story of the trip," declared Walter.

Then followed the leave-taking.

Walter and his fair charge took a train for New York. It was wonderful with what readiness Bernhilda assumed the style of dress and manners of civilization.

Walter put her at once in his mother's charge. That his hopes of Bernhilda may some day be justified we may rest well assured.

Jedediah fairly embraced Frank in leave-taking.

"Yew are the most wonderful man in ther world," he said. "Yew air a bigger inventor than Jonathan Crook. I'll hope yew'll invent a railroad tew the moon yit."

"I fear not so great a thing as that!" laughed Frank.

"Yas, yew will. But now cum up tew Skittletown a visitin,' I kin promis' yew a durned good time."

Frank warmly thanked the Yankee. This ended the parting scene.

The Rainbow did not fly again. The long voyage had sadly racked her delicate machinery, but Frank declared that his efforts were not at an end.

"I will build another; even better," he declared.

Barney and Pomp are yet with him. And having thus brought all to a happy ending, let us bid the reader a kind adieu.

[THE END.]

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